United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6050

September 15, 2016

Admiral John M. Richardson, USN
Chief of Naval Operations
2000 Navy Pentagon, Room 4E662
Washington, DC 20350-1000

The Honorable Sean J. Stackley
Assistant Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon, Room 4C656
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Admiral Richardson and Secretary Stackley:

We believe that it is appropriate that you are reviewing the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) program and that such a review is long overdue. Since the Navy began acquiring the LCS the Navy has deviated from many aspects of a normal acquisition program, including deploying the ship before any significant testing had been conducted. As a result, the LCS program still faces significant challenges. The recently concluded LCS program review, which you chartered in February 2016, presented an opportunity for a re-evaluation of core assumptions and elements of the program. While the review yielded some promising initiatives, we are concerned that several critical foundational assumptions of the program were not challenged, including operational availability, Navy's in-house technical support for LCS, manpower requirements, and transition to a new small surface combatant.

Accordingly, we urge you to question all of the LCS foundational assumptions and take the following additional steps:

First, consider reducing the planned operational availability of LCSs to a sustainable level, or see if the Navy can support normal deployment availability before expanding availability to 50%. While the LCS review adjusted the crewing concept, it did not change the employment construct of having one LCS continuously deployed for every two ships. The significant challenges that surfaced during the first three LCS deployments provide strong evidence that this tempo is likely unsustainable. Mechanical problems limited the USS *Freedom*'s 2013 deployment time at sea to just 35 percent. The USS *Fort Worth* suffered an engineering casualty on deployment in January 2016 and remained in port in Singapore for six months for repairs. And the USS *Coronado* recently suffered a major engineering casualty resulting in the ship backtracking to Hawaii for repairs.

Under the Navy's current plan, each LCS will spend more than 50 percent of its 25-year service life deployed. In contrast, most destroyers are planned to be deployed less than 25 percent of their service lives, as part of the Navy's Optimized Fleet Response Plan (O-FRP). Maintaining 50 percent or greater LCS operational availability will likely require even more operations and maintenance funding than planned, particularly if unexpected engineering casualties continue at the current rate. Only after the LCS proves it can sustainably meet the O-FRP tempo should a higher operational tempo be considered.

We understand that the Navy has tied this push for an increase availability to a shortfall in small surface combatants (SSCs). However, the Navy chose to reduce its force of SSCs. In 2010, the Navy planned to maintain a combination of at least 28 mine sweepers, frigates and LCS through 2040. By the end of 2015, following the Navy's decision to decommission early the 10 remaining *Oliver Hazard Perry*-class frigates, the SSC inventory had dropped to 17 ships.

However, compared to today, deploying LCSs at a rate similar to destroyers would still increase overseas presence with the added benefits of further streamlining, simplifying, and reducing costs in the LCS program through a single crew per ship. Most non-deployed LCSs would still be available for surge deployments if necessary.

Second, we urge you to establish a land-based LCS propulsion and machinery control test site. In our view, your plan fails to correct a key program deficiency, providing sufficient in-house LCS engineering technical support. Without in-depth government expertise and test capabilities, this program will continue to rely excessively on the original equipment manufacturers for troubleshooting and corrective actions. As our committee urged in the Senate report accompanying S. 2943 (S. Rept. 114-255) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017,

> "...a LCS propulsion and machinery control test capability would provide the Navy with a critical resource that is currently lacking to troubleshoot issues, identify root causes of casualties, and provide in-depth training to sailors. The net effect of such a test capability would be to reduce the time, cost, and inexperience associated with LCS propulsion and machinery control casualties."

Until a more robust level of support is provided, we are concerned that every major LCS engineering casualty will continue to be a crisis, as demonstrated in the past year with four different propulsion casualties on four different LCSs resulting in ships returning to port for prolonged casualty investigations and corrective actions.

Third, we urge you conduct a bottom-up review of the manpower requirements for each LCS. We understand that the Navy's review took a limit of 70 billets as a given, excluding the aviation detachment. With eight LCSs delivered, now is the time to revalidate the quantity and quality of manpower requirements to determine if sufficient personnel are assigned to perform all watchstanding, warfighting, damage control, force protection, maintenance, and other duties. This type of analysis is particularly warranted in light of your review directing LCS crews to conduct more underway maintenance, rather than relying on in-port contractors, which will place an additional burden on the crew.

Finally, we urge you to start planning now to procure and begin deliveries of a new small surface combatant as soon as possible in the 2020s. While your review sought to ensure sailors have the tools and training to operate LCSs safely and effectively, as our committee expressed in the Senate report accompanying S. 2943, we believe it is just as important to proceed aggressively with defining the requirements, setting the acquisition strategy, and fielding the LCS replacement. The committee believes the analytical assumptions for the LCS replacement must address the capability and survivability shortfalls of LCSs, including the ability to: (1) attack enemy surface ships at over-the-horizon ranges with multiple salvos; (2) defend nearby noncombatant ships from air and missile threats as an escort; (3) conduct long-duration escort or patrol missions without frequent refueling; and (4) exhibit robust survivability characteristics.

We applaud your initiative in attempting to correct major deficiencies in the LCS program and urge you to take these long overdue actions – reduce the planned LCS operational availability to a sustainable level, establish a land-based test site, conduct a bottom-up manpower review, and begin planning to field the LCS replacement. Until these actions are taken, we will have significant concerns about supporting the procurement of additional LCSs.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed
Ranking Member

John McCain
Chairman